

1/30/05
Springs man wants to get conversation going



BRYAN OLLER, THE GAZETTE

Ronnie Barnes listens to a caller during a Dec. 8 recording of "Ask Gay Ronnie" with DJ Joe "Jo Jo" Borsello on Dec. 8. The show pokes fun at homosexuality but addresses serious questions posed by callers.

By LISA MARTÍNEZ
THE GAZETTE

'Ask gay Ronnie'

Go ahead and stare. Ronnie Barnes has nothing to hide.

Dressed in bright-red leather vest, oversized hoop earrings and platform shoes, Barnes sashays down the street. His limp-wrist action is down to perfection.

People call him "fairy," "freak" and worse, but Barnes doesn't care. He hopes others notice his flamboyancy and ask him questions.

He also works on cars and instructs a dance class. He collects and delivers food for youth centers. He'd like people to know that, too.

Barnes is gay. He's suspected that since childhood, but didn't acknowledge it in school and church as he was growing up.

He's been openly gay for a long time. Now, at 40, he wants to talk about it to the entire community.

He started co-hosting a weekly talk

show on gay issues in November with the help of friends who are disc jockeys at KKMg 98.9 Magic FM.

He's hosting the show in a city that hasn't embraced gays. In 2003, City Council members debated health benefits for same-sex partners and in 1992 a Colorado Springs group spearheaded a state constitutional amendment to bar laws to protect gays and lesbians.

People call into the "Ask Gay Ronnie" show Wednesday nights from 10 to 10:30 p.m. and ask how to come out to family, or

support a gay friend. They want to know about fashion, what it's like to have sex with a man and what Barnes finds attractive about the same sex.

"It's basically the same things you're interested in," he tells a female caller. "Good looks, nice personality, whatever you think is hot in a guy."

He talks about issues he says were missed by the Pikes Peak Gay and Lesbian Community Center, which recently reported that most respondents in a survey believe gays have adequate resources in Colorado Springs. The center estimates that 10,000 gay people live in the area.

Yet there are few gay bars and clubs, and few programs in schools to support students who want to come out, Barnes says.

ENGINE FIRE ON PLATTE AVENUE



BRYAN OLLER, THE GAZETTE

Springfield firefighter attempts to unhinge the hood of a pickup Saturday on Platte Avenue. Richard Seabolt's engine began smoking and erupted in flames before firefighters arrived and extinguished the blaze.

Men held in paleontologist's slaying

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Two men suspected of killing a paleontologist and stealing artifacts from his home were arrested after discovery of the crime at a bar, police said.

James Wessel, 40, and Richard Kasparson, 34, were being held in the Jefferson County jail Saturday on suspicion of first-degree murder and burglary. The men have no previous records.

The men were suspected of robbing Charles "Rep" Repenning, an nationally known paleontologist.

Police found Repenning's body in his bedroom Jan. 5 after a neighbor reported the rear door window of Repenning's home had been removed and that his dog was running loose.

Several artifacts were stolen from his home, including a Navajo rug, fossils, pistols, a Nazi sword and German Luger, court documents show.

Investigators have said they don't think the killers knew Repenning.

An employee at a bar in Edgewater told police Tuesday that he had heard two men talking about a burglary.

The employee said one patron talked

of strangling an old man, court records show.

The employee said he recognized Kasparson because he had recently applied for a job at the bar. An earlier booking photo of Kasparson from Jefferson County matched an image of a suspect caught by a bank security camera where Repenning's stolen credit card was used the day of the slaying, police said.

Kasparson, who was arrested Thursday night, denied involvement when police contacted him at his home in Denver, court documents said. Wessel was arrested in Thornton early Friday.

Net dramatic end in engineering contest

ships, prestige rest on basswood platforms

240 bridges, students competed — "You see some that actually ex-

"We get a grade for this, but it really is fun," said Directo, a sophomore at Cheyenne Mountain High School.

Twenty-year volunteer Guenther

party job

NEW YORK • Former Denver Mayor Wellington Webb was among seven contenders making their case Saturday to be the Democratic Party's national chairman during a regional caucus in Manhattan.

Two weeks before the Democratic National Committee elects a new leader, Webb said he has the necessary management experience from his years as mayor of Denver.

But it was Howard Dean who lit up the crowd. Dean's fiery words denouncing the Republican Party and his promotion of grass-roots work were familiar themes from his unsuccessful presidential race, and he made clear that if elected chairman, he wouldn't temper that message.

"We cannot be Republican-light if we want to win elections," Dean said.

The five other candidates were former Rep. Martin Frost of Texas, former Rep. Tim Roemer of Indiana, Democratic activists Donnie Fowler and Simon Rosenberg, and Ohio state chairman David Leland.

Norton wants courts out of water disputes

DENVER • Interior Secretary Gale Norton says Western water disputes should be settled through negotiation, not in the courtroom.

Speaking Friday in Denver at a Colorado Water Congress meeting, Norton said her department seeks to promote cooperation.

"We have to resolve some long-standing conflicts today. We must, since a growing and prosperous West will continue to add increased pressure on our limited water supplies," she said.

The seven states that are members of the 1922 Colorado River Compact last year resolved a 75-year-old dispute, including California's reduction of water deliveries.

"We were able to bask in the glow of our historic accomplishment for about 3 nanoseconds before we started focusing on how the Colorado River Basin states address the continuing drought," Norton said.

She said the states are working on contingency plans that she will review in April.

"If the drought continues, we will move ahead with formal plans to reduce water deliveries in the lower basin. I hope we will not have to do so without a consensus plan."

Fugitive injured

BARNES: Standing out from the crowd

FROM PAGE 1

Gay advocacy groups only help people who are comfortable with their sexuality, not those too scared to ask for help even though they may need it the most, he says. He wishes more resources were available to give them confidence and coping skills.

Most of all, he wishes people would talk about it.

IN THE STUDIO

Fat Jake is on edge again. He has been since Barnes arrived at the studio of KKMg — a station that plays hip-hop and R&B.

Homosexuality is the topic even when Barnes is off the air, and the banter spares no one. He playfully implies others might have gay notions.

It makes Jake Johnson, who DJs under the name Fat Jake on weekends and screens callers, uncomfortable.

"I am not gay," he says repeatedly when Barnes makes lewd comments about Fat Jake's sexuality. "I am straight. I like women, OK?"

That's what it's like every Wednesday night during and after the show.

Some callers ask serious questions. Others make fun of homosexuality. DJ JoJo, or Joe Borsello, enlivens the conversation with remarks playing on gay stereotypes.

The Federal Communications Commission prohibits indecent content on the radio from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. So JoJo and company can get away with a lot more after 10.

On the show's first night, a caller tells Barnes the Bible strictly prohibits men having sex with other men.

Barnes points out other parts of the Bible that prohibit eating pork or cheating on spouses.

Another night, a woman says she caught her son putting on makeup. She doesn't know what to do.

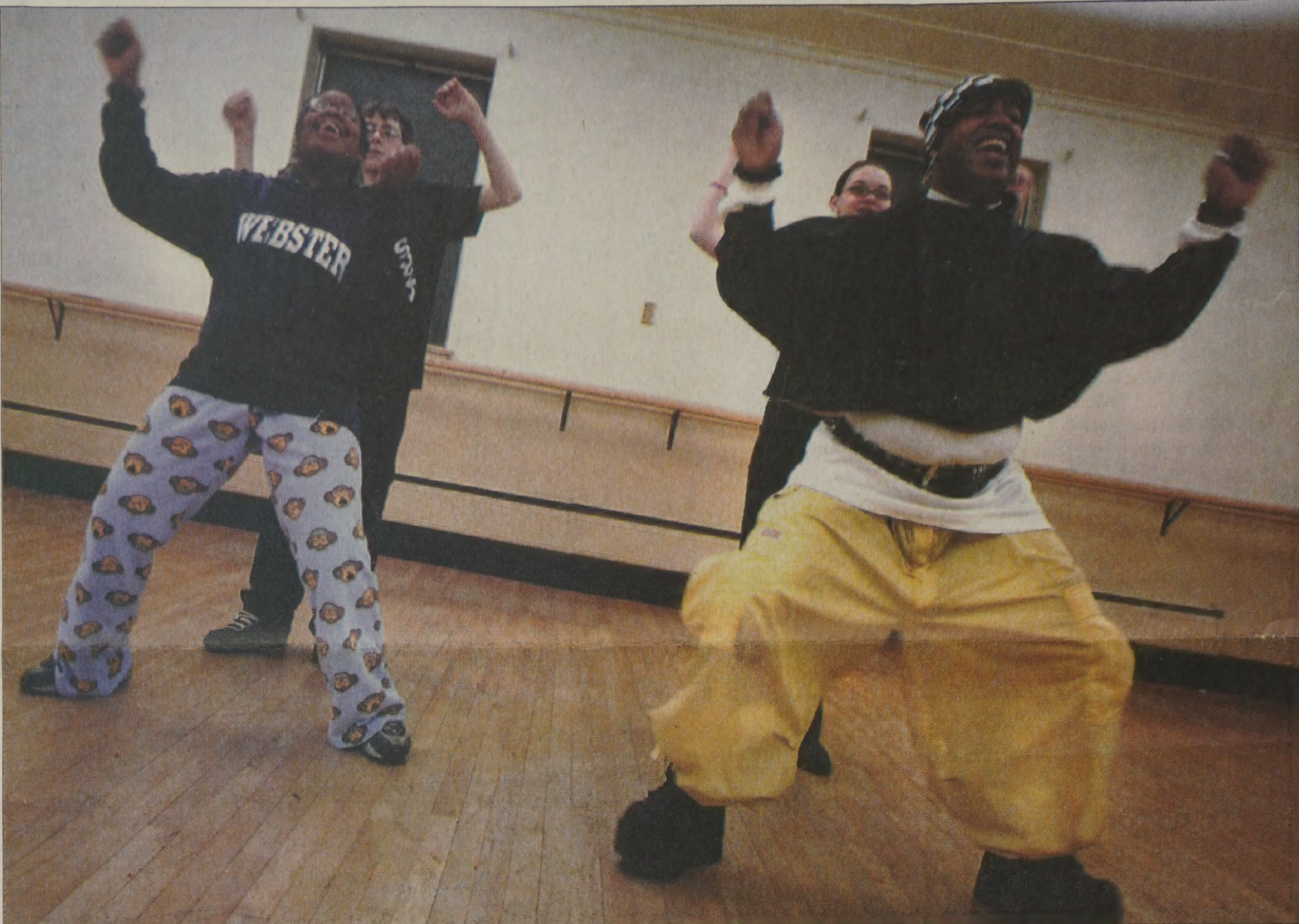
"It's either because he's trying to hide something he doesn't like, or he's just trying to be like Mom or Sis," Barnes tells her. "Either way, you better look into what's going on."

"Ask Gay Ronnie" generates more phone calls each week, Borsello says. "We have some fun with gays and lesbians. It's making light of an issue that is so taboo."

For months before the show's debut, Barnes and his disc jockey friends talked about getting him on the air. Then, Barnes filled in as a guest on different days. Station managers were receptive to doing more.

The popularity of such television shows as "Will and Grace" and "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy" encourages discussion of gay issues. The show is a good way to continue that, says Chad Rufer, KKMg's program director.

Despite sometimes off-color content and criticism from some call-



PHOTOS BY BRYAN OLLER, THE GAZETTE

ers, the show hasn't caused problems for the station, and it hasn't been an issue with advertisers, Rufer says.

Barnes isn't paid for his radio work.

SOMEONE DIFFERENT

As Barnes walks down Nevada Avenue toward the Colorado Springs Ballet Academy downtown, people stare.

They snicker. They point.

But they don't say a word to Barnes, clad in yellow windbreaker pants, black leather vest and black-and-white checkered hat.

Barnes pays them no mind. He fiddles with his gaudy rings and walks into the dance studio, where he teaches hip-hop classes to teens twice a week.

Elizabeth Withers, a Colorado Springs School student, practices hip-hop in addition to ballet and Irish dances. Barnes talked Eliza-

beth into taking hip-hop after watching her in another class.

Elizabeth, 15, says that knowing Barnes helps her understand those who look and act differently. It's refreshing to know someone who isn't afraid of being different from the "clones" she sees at school each day, she says.

Harrison House Care Center residents also seem to enjoy Barnes' presence. They wave — and stare — as he passes.

Barnes designs fliers, helps with paperwork and maintains the property at the center owned by his mother, Bertha Barnes. She's supportive of him, but she wishes he wouldn't be so open about his sexuality, believing such things should be private.

She doesn't listen to the show. "I don't want to hear about something I don't approve of," she says. "But I love my son no matter what."

In back from left, Joseph Haase, Jacob Jendro and Mason Hartzler help Barnes load a hearse with bread for area shelters and homes. "This is the Phoenix. It brings life out of death," Barnes says of the unusual delivery vehicle.



Ronnie Barnes, right, makes dancing

fun for Amber Noll, left, 15, and other participants in a recent hip-hop dance class at the Colorado Springs Ballet Academy and Company downtown.

GROWING UP GAY

During his childhood in Germany and then Colorado Springs, Barnes wore his mother's clothing, put on his sisters' makeup and watched TV fashion shows.

He designed and sewed his own outfits. His brothers were athletic, but he hated sports.

He had crushes on boys in middle and high school but ignored his feelings. He never dated.

People called him names at Mitchell High School. He was teased and harassed for the way he looked and talked.

He didn't acknowledge his sexuality, even though friends later said they always knew he was gay.

Barnes came out to family at 19, after meeting his first boyfriend at a job-training program.

His mother and siblings were supportive, but his father never had much to say about it. He doesn't approve of homosexuality, Barnes says.

When Barnes was growing up, his family attended a Seventh-day Adventist Church in Colorado Springs almost every week. He took in all of the lessons and yearned for more. Even after he came out, he sang in the choir.

One weekend, Barnes entered a Michael Jackson look-alike contest and won. The pastor criticized him for going out during the Sabbath, a time when church members are expected to stay home.

Barnes was told he could no longer sing at church. That was the beginning of the end of Barnes' church

life. He still believes in God, but he attends church only for weddings, funerals or other special events.

'IF THAT'S WHAT IT TAKES'

Barnes thinks gay people would be happier not hiding their sexual orientation. He feels his life is an example of how others should live: out in the open.

Ryan Acker, director of the Pikes Peak Gay and Lesbian Community Center, agrees. But it's not always that simple.

It would be nice for all gays just to come out and be comfortable with their sexuality, Acker says, but they don't all have Barnes' confidence.

The center offers 20 support groups to gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered people, but more resources are needed, Acker says.

It's more difficult to help gays in Colorado Springs than places like Denver, which have gay districts, he says. There is no specific area in this city where gays live and work.

Acker is glad that "Ask Gay Ronnie" is on the air. The show might educate people and lead to more acceptance, he says.

Whether he's on the radio airwaves or on the street, Barnes is constantly scrutinized. That might exhaust most people, but Barnes says he mostly thrives on it, although he admits he occasionally gets frustrated as he hears the same comments repeatedly.

He hopes the attention, and air time, will increase.

"I know if I get people's attention, I can educate them," Barnes says. "Even if they make remarks, say negative things, that's what I want."

"If that's what it takes to get people to talk, I'll take it."

CONTACT THE WRITER: 476-1669 or
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will lead to criminal bosses.

To do so, agents said they will keep busting "drop houses," where smugglers hide migrants while payment and travel arrangements are made.

"We are trying to tie those individual drop houses that we respond to with the organizations that we are investigating," said Patricia Schmidt, deputy special agent in charge of Immigration and Customs Enforcement's investigations in Phoenix.

Unlike past crackdowns,

sent back home, but officials hope that, by keeping pressure on smugglers, they can make it harder to sneak people into the country.

"It does no good to just have this revolving door," Schmidt said. "So what we needed to do was focus on the infrastructure that caused them to come to Arizona."

Advocates for comprehensive change in U.S. immigration policy said the approach doesn't confront the larger problems.

The heaviest flow of illegal border-crossers into Arizona began this month and is expected to continue through March. Migrants, some returning from an extended holiday back home, are seeking seasonal agricultural work and other jobs in the U.S. labor market.

More than any other state in recent years, Arizona has been dogged by a heavy flow of illegal immigrants after the government tightened enforcement in

border, others smugglers' neighborhoods that make it easy to hide their operations and plenty of transportation routes for sending customers to other regions.

Although the majority of migrants crossing into the United States still use Arizona as their entry point, pressure from the crackdown has prompted some smugglers to shift from Phoenix to Los Angeles, Houston, Las Vegas or rural communities in Arizona.

Until the beginning of the crackdown in late 2003, local police said they sometimes had no choice but to release migrants into neighborhoods, because there weren't enough immigration agents to handle the hundreds of drop houses in metropolitan Phoenix.

A more consistent response in Phoenix has led to arrests of more than 300 since the crackdown began, many of whom were workers for smuggling groups that ran drop houses.

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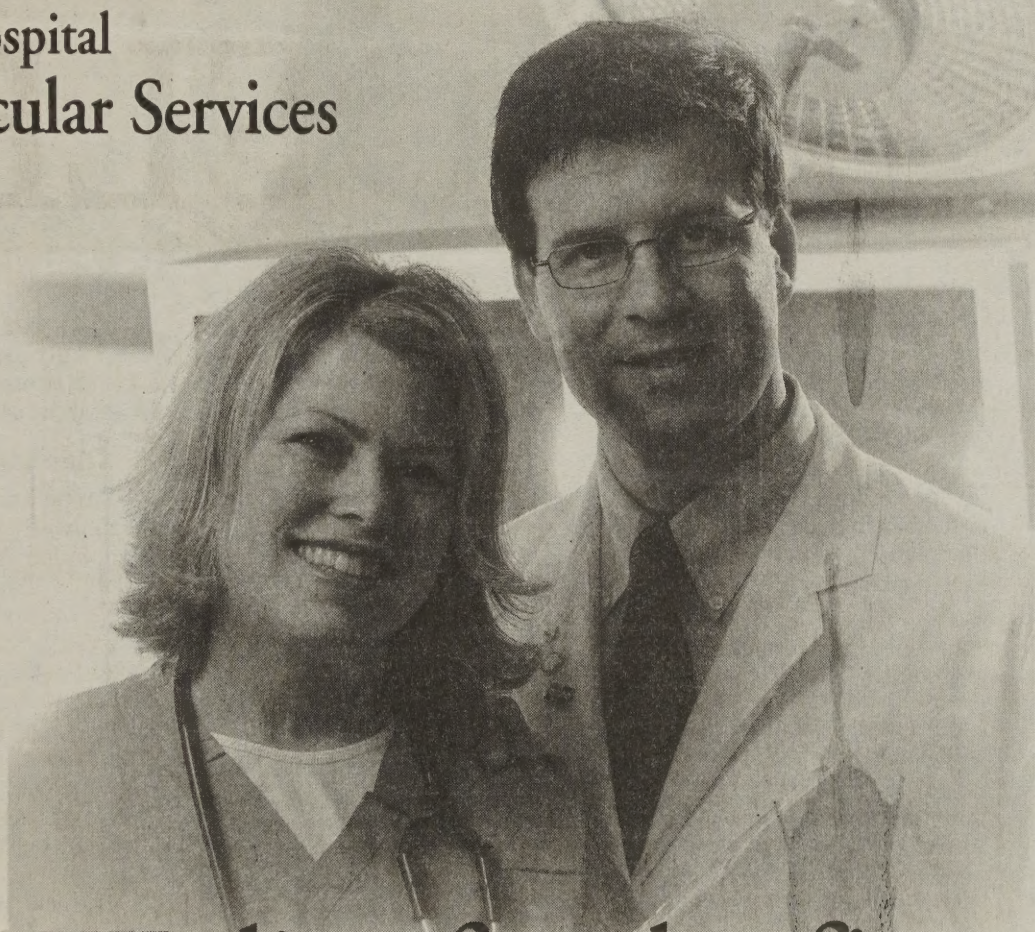
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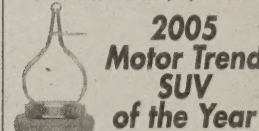
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